

## CHAPTER 1

### The Repertoire of Rites

This is a study of Christian liturgy: its history and the meanings that have been associated with its forms, content, and practices. Liturgy is what Christians have performed in their public assemblies. Worship is both more and less than liturgy. It is more in that it includes the devotional practices of individuals and households as well as public

Praise and common prayer, it is less in that liturgy is not only prayer but ritual. Ritual has to do not only with what a community does before God but also with what the members of a community do in interaction with one another; It is a pattern of behavior that expresses and forms a way of life consistent with the community's beliefs and values.

There has long been a bias against ritual in Western intellectual and religious thought. Rationalism denigrated ritualistic behavior as obsessive and regressive as a need to impose order on a chaotic world and rooted in infantile strategies for managing conflict and stress, Rationalists, of course, operate with a worldview that posits an orderly universe, They believe, with Sigmund Freud, that conflict and stress would disappear if human beings would leave their infantile compulsions behind. Against such a view a more

Positive assessment of the role of ritual in human development has been posited, for example, by the psychologist Erik Erikson. Also, biogeneticists have posited a biogenetic source of the human capacity for ritual and mythmaking located in the complex relationships between the left and right hemispheres of the brain and in the older (reptilian) and newer (new mammalian) strata of the evolution of the brain. Unlike the older scientists who tended to reduce all human experiences to material/physical (e.g, biochemical) causes the newer scientists like Eugene d'Aquilt and his structuralist colleagues take seriously the spiritual capacities of human beings.

As the whole of human life and endeavors is a system of rituals, so is the life and mission of the Christian community a system of rituals. Educating our young, bringing new members into the community, looking after the needs of the most vulnerable members of church and society, and worshiping God are all ritual activities. But as Romald Grimes has said, "The Liturgy of a ritual system is often, but not always, its most paradigmatic, most central, most valued rite." The liturgy is the activity in which the life and mission of the church are paradigmatically and centrally expressed. As there is no development in human life without ritualization,<sup>5</sup> so there is no unritualized Christian life, Since every Christian church has an act of gathering in which its corporate life and mission are expressed, here are no Christian churches without liturgy. The distinction commonly made between "liturgical" churches and "nonliturgical" churches is not helpful, Even Quakers, who admit no texts or sacraments into their meetings, nevertheless observe certain patterns of behavior in their meetings. What they do in their meetings is their leitourgia, their "public work." Their liturgy is a ritual that comprises gathering communal

silence, sharing insights, and developing a sense of the meeting. What Quakers may lack in their meetings, but which some other churches have plenty of in their liturgies, are ceremonies. Ceremonies are the particular actions that constitute a ritual, such as carrying a flag at the head of a parade and saluting it as it passes by or carrying a cross in procession and bowing as it passes down the aisle of the church.

Not surprisingly, Christian ritual forms are not dissimilar from the ritual forms of other religions or social groups. After all, there are a limited number of ways in which human beings may express themselves. This was already noticed by ancient church fathers such as Justin Martyr, who regarded pagan rites of washing and sharing meals as diabolical imitations of Christian sacraments. The rites of washing (baptism) and eating and drinking together (eucharistic meal) that Jesus instituted and commanded to be done had a prehistory in Judaism and corollary rites in other religions. These acts are also imbued with natural meanings. Natural symbols are ones that have meanings rooted in ordinary life. For example, washing is a form of cleansing, and eating and drinking are ways of receiving nourishment, so baptism has been spoken of as a washing away of sin and Holy Communion has been spoken of as spiritual nourishment. Theological meaning draws on the natural associations of these symbolic acts and expands on them in evocative way.

## THE ROLE OF SYMBOL

The theological tradition has wanted to distinguish between signs that signify or point to something other than themselves, and symbols that make present or provide participation in that which is represented (sum-ballein, “to throw together”). Sometimes it has been suggested that signs serve functions whereas symbols serve meaning. For example, a stop sign points to the necessity of stopping and often employs the word “stop” on its octagonal shape. But the sign is painted red because red is understood to be a symbolic color of danger. Or again, the bread and wine of the eucharist are called signs of the body and blood of Christ in those traditions in which there is an exact correlation between bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ. But the way Holy Communion is administered is symbolic because it suggests the meanings of receiving these sacramental signs. These examples also indicate the difficulty of distinguishing between signs and symbols. In reality, they coalesce.

It may be more convenient to regard symbols as aspects of the general category of signs. All signs convey meaning but symbols expand rather than limit meaning. This is especially important in the use of words, which are both signs and symbols. For example, the verb “to eat” usually designates a bodily function and the act of taking nourishment. But the same term can be used metaphorically, as in “to eat your words.” The Christian liturgy, like the Bible on which it is largely based, makes ample use of symbolic and metaphorical language simply because sacred reality can only be expressed in images and symbols. This is why we must be on our guard against the Western demotion of symbolic language, as when it is said, “This is only a symbol.” Western thought has sometimes driven a wedge between “symbol” and “reality.” But the

language of liturgy, like the language of the Bible, does not know of such a differentiation. Reality is expressed in symbolic language. Human beings use words (which are also symbols) to express concepts that are within the realm of revelation and their experience in order to articulate the inexpressible.

Paul Ricoeur defines “symbol” as “any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be comprehended only through the first.’ This alerts us to the double meanings of symbols. For example, the ceremonial breaking of bread in the celebration of the eucharist is already a symbolic act signifying the fellowship created by the meal. But symbolic interpretations of the Lord’s Supper also see the fraction pointing to the sacrifice of Christ, the benefits of which are conveyed to the communicants.

The double meaning of symbols easily fosters allegorization, in which what is seen or said is neglected in favor of what is thought or imagined. Allegory turns every

word and object into an instruction, often with a precise meaning or designation. Of course, allegorical interpretations of words and actions are deeply embedded in the theological tradition, and at its best allegory has stimulated the religious imagination. One finds a sophisticated form of allegory in the writings of the ancient church fathers, especially in the Alexandrine school, in which theologians like Clement and Origen deepened spirituality by drawing attention away from things in themselves to the contemplation of higher mysteries. But a crude form of allegory can be found in the expositions of the mass (*expositiones Missae*) during the Middle Ages in which everything was made to represent whatever the commentator chose. For example, when the priest washed his hands at the offertory, this was said to represent Pontius Pilate washing his hands of responsibility for Jesus at his trial. Allegorical interpretation turned the mass into a reenactment of the passion of Christ. The practical result was that the laity were left as spectators of a clerical performance as the priest offered the sacrifice of the mass. Representation in the sense of dramatic portrayal was substituted for symbolism in the true sense. This served to arouse devotion, but did not foster participation.

Allegory has not been preferred as much as typology in the best liturgical commentaries. Typology suggests that there is a pattern in God's redemptive activity. So, for example, baptism is seen as a type of the exodus crossing of the sea or as a type of the flood in which God rescued his people from destruction. Typology has served the biblical and liturgical acts of remembrance (Hebrew: *zakar*; Greek: *anamnesis*). The cultic rituals are not an intellectual act of recall but the emotional act of entering into a relationship with God whose earlier deeds imply a promise for the present and the future. This is clearly expressed in Deuteronomy 5:2-4: “The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire.” Typology connects the past and the present on the basis of promise and fulfillment. Typology in the service of remembrance of past redemptive acts can perhaps best be

seen in the text of the Exsultet in the Easter Vigil. Here it is proclaimed that “this is the night” of the passover, the exodus, the resurrection of Christ, and baptism—all experienced anew and simultaneously “this night.”

It Is indeed right and salutary that we should with full devotion of heart and mind and voice praise the invisible God, the Father Almighty, and his only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ; who paid for us the debt of Adam to the eternal Father, and who by his precious blood redeemed us from the bondage to the ancient sin. For this indeed is the Paschal Feast in which the true Lamb is slain, by whose blood the doorposts of the faithful are made holy This is the night in which, in ancient times, you delivered our forebears. The children of Israel, from the land of Egypt; and led them, dry-shod, through the Red Sea. This, indeed, is the night in which the darkness of str has been purged way by the rising brightness. This is the night in which all who believe in Christ are rescued from evil and the gloom of sin, are renewed in grace, and are restored to holiness. This is the night in which, breaking the chains of death, Christ arises from hell in triumph. For it would have profited us nothing to be born had we not also been redeemed.

Many commentators have pointed out that modern Western people have difficulty apprehending symbolic meaning We are a literal-minded people for whom signs work better. This also explains why people have difficulty with the historic liturgy of the church. For this liturgy is freighted with archetypal and primordial symbols of light and darkness, inclusion and exclusion, feasting and fasting that serve to open us to a sense of the sacred. The historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, likened the loss of the sacred to a second fall of humankind- -the fall into secular, desacralized existence. For many people, life is no longer centered in or determined by an overarching sacred reality. Yet an awareness of absence also suggests the possibility of a past--- and therefore a future—presence. As Eliade wrote. “In his deepest being. Man still retains a memory of [the sacred]. As after the first fall’ his ancestor, the primordial man, retained intelligence enough to enable him to rediscover the traces of God that are visible in the world.”

Where there is memory, there is the possibility of retrieval. This retrieval may be facilitated through the performance of ritual actions, since the sacramental signs connect us with life and the world and the sacramental celebrations connect us with the memory of the past (anamnesis = reactualization) and hope for the future (prolepsis = anticipation of eschatological reality). What we are suggesting is that the obedient performance of rituals that have lost their meaning because of our symbolic amnesia may help in the recovery of meaning, precisely because of the evocative power of symbols.

## THE ROLE OF RITUAL

Ritual is necessary in any society as a means of facilitating both continuity with the past (the conserving aspect of ritual) and an orderly process of change (the renewing aspect of ritual).

Roland Delattre has identified four aspects of ritual, two that serve a conserving function and two that serve a renewing function.” The two that serve a conserving function are anchorage going through the motions (e.g., toilet-training for children, Christian catechumenate) and articulation (e.g., human arts, baptism and eucharist). The two aspects of ritual that serve a renewing function are negotiation (e.g., writing memoirs, confession and absolution) and passage (e.g., marriage, vocation). The rituals of a community, if sound, will provide for both stability and change, conservation and reformation. They can move members of a society through the large rhythms of the life-cycle (birth, Maturation, vocation, death) and the psychological microbes, or “little pieties,” as Erving Goffman called “interaction ritual.”

Eliade has sorted through the repertoire of rites and categorized them according to their use in the sanctification of life, time, and space, in both *The Sacred and the Profane* and *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. This provides a convenient way of categorizing the repertoire of rites available to the Christian community. Rites that sanctify life deal largely with passage through various crises. They are by definition occasional. Such rites include:

- initiation (baptism, confirmation, first communion)
- penance (confession and forgiveness, reconciliation)
- vocation (ordination, commissionings, installations)
- marriage
- childbirth
- sickness anniversaries
- death and burial

Rites that sanctify time are cyclical or periodically recurring. These include:

- daily prayer offices
- weekly celebrations of word and eucharistic meal
- festivals and seasons of the church year, with special customs

Rites that sanctify space may be either occasional or cyclical. These include:

Consecration of churches; blessing of dwellings

- homecomings; pilgrimages
- groundbreakings; anniversaries

Rituals can decay, no longer conveying the force or meaning in personal or social life they once had. But what threatens ritual depends on the kind of rituals, Rituals that serve a conserving purpose are threatened when the very function of ritual is despised,

Along with the authority structures and hierarchies such rituals depend on and reinforce. Mary Douglas has written that “one of the gravest problems of our day is the lack of commitment to common symbols... But more mysterious is a widespread, explicit rejection of rituals as such. Ritual has become a bad word signifying empty conformity. We are witnessing a revolt against formalism, even against form,”

On the other hand, authoritarianism and elitism are precisely the conditions that threaten rituals of renewal, Rites of passage, for example, depend for their effectiveness on a playfulness and risk-taking that pits novices against authority figures and builds up a sense of camaraderie among the initiates. It is necessary to give free play to these dynamics to create an authority that is not authoritarian and a hierarchy that is not elite but servile. In the community of Jesus’ disciples, “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43, 45)

## rites of passage

Rites of passage attempt to deal creatively with the unavoidable fact that, as anthropologist Arnold van Gennep put it, “For groups, as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be re-born. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, then to begin acting again, but in a different way.” For individuals and societies, “there are always new thresholds to cross: ... the thresholds of birth, adolescence, maturity and old age; the threshold of death and that of afterlife.”

Van Gennep compared the structure of rites of passage to that of taking a journey: there is leaving-taking, passage, and arrival. He wrote that “a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation).” The term liminal” is derived from the Latin *limen* (threshold).

This scheme should alert us to the fact that the rites of passage involve a process that is marked out by different stages. Initiation, for example, involves being separated from a former status (such as childhood), passing through a novitiate (such as adolescence with all its excruciating experiential learnings), and being incorporated into a new status (such as adulthood with all its privileges and responsibilities). In some societies the liminal stage of transition is compressed into a few weeks as one moves quickly from childhood to adult responsibilities. In many traditional societies, adolescence happens so quickly as to be practically nonexistent. In other societies, such as those of western

Europe and North America, the need for universal literacy, compounded by the technological information explosion and the need for complex skills to serve its sophisticated

Paratus, have pushed the time of childhood back and the time of adulthood forward, thus prolonging the period of adolescence, that ambiguous betwixt and between stage when one no longer has the liberties of childhood but has not yet fully assumed the restrictive responsibilities of adulthood. The rites of passage to adulthood in such a society as ours are diffuse, prolonged, and subtle, including rituals of dating, getting a driver's license, graduating from high school and college, and establishing independence from one's family over a long period of time.

The ancient rites of Christian initiation can easily be analyzed in terms of van

Gennep's tripartite scheme of the rites of passage. Whether Christian baptism is understood in terms of a co-death and burial with Christ (as in the letters of Paul) or in terms of adoption by God the Father (as in the model of the baptism of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels), it assumes a demarcation between the old life of sin and death and the new life in Christ. This entails ritualizing the transition between one state and the other. By the time of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome, written early in the third century.

Christian initiation involved being separated from the life of this world (marked by enrollment into the catechumenate), being taught and engaged in the values and lifestyle of the divine kingdom (marked by the catechumenate), and being incorporated into the fellowship of the eschatological community (marked by the water bath, the laying on of hands, the kiss of peace, and participation for the first time in the eucharistic meal of the Christian community).

It is clear that the center of gravity in this ritual process was the water bath, as The terms baptizein and baptisma indicate. The fact that Paul could construe baptism as a symbolic burial with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12) suggests an immersion in water. That Was the case with the usual Jewish rite of purification (the tebilah), which may have been one of the antecedents of Christian baptism. Mosaics on early Christian baptistery walls suggest that the candidates were baptized naked, which was also the case with the Jewish rite. Taking off and putting on one's clothes for a bath is certainly a natural action; but it was compared metaphorically to putting off the old nature and taking on the new and the rather common ethical figure of taking off bad habits and putting on virtuous ones.

For these reasons the center of gravity in the Christian rites of initiation was not preceded by a washing, but was the washing. The significance of this act is apparent if we compare Christian initiation to its nearest analogies: the Jewish immersion of proselytes and initiation into the pagan mysteries. In the mystery cults, lustration rites were preparatory for admission into the mysteries proper. The same was true in Judaism: the water rites served the purpose of purification before entering sacred time or place. For this reason they were often associated with the temple cult. The extension and democratization of the concept of purity and the means of attaining or restoring it by being loyal to the commandments brought about, among the

Pharisees, the innovation of the immersion pool. Yet. Among the Pharisees, there was no thought that one could pass from the im- pure world into a pure community; purity had to be continually reestablished, So the immersions were frequently repeated. But Christianity accepted only one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Baptism became, for Christianity, a permanent threshold between the impure world and the pure group, between those who remain in the world and those who have been initiated, between those who were outside the church's fellowship and those who have been brought inside to the gathering around the table, yet it is evident already in Paul's letters that the church was not totally a pure group (see especially 1 Cor. 5\_6). Paul's baptismal teaching was often in the context of problems that arose in church life. He was constantly exhorting his readers to remember in what state they were before they were baptized and to behave in ways appropriate to their baptism (Rom. 6; 8:12-17; Gal. 3:26-5:6; 1 Cor. 1-4; and much of Colossians and Ephesians). It was in this context that rites of penance emerged in the church. Those who grossly failed to demonstrate the signs of their formation into the new life in Christ had to be re-formed by means of participation in a process similar to the catechumenate-the order of penitents. As time went on it became customary to call on the whole church to be characterized by a sense of holiness, unity, love, equality, humility, and so forth during the time of Christian initiation (what has become the season of Lent). Thus, Lent became a time when the whole church returned, as it were, to the catechumenate, and in which the whole church, as it were, entered the order of penitents. This return bequeathed to this season of the church year its enduring catechetical and penitential emphasis.

Christian initiation can be related to the theory of ritual in terms of Victor Turner's understanding of liminality.<sup>18</sup> He has shown that the liminal, or betwixt and between stage, is the center of gravity in rites of passage. The liminal or transitional stage re- lates to the moments of separation and incorporation—death and rebirth—without ignoring the chaos that lies between them. Indeed. The purpose of the liminal stage in rites of passage is to use that chaos in a creative way. Rites of passage move from sense to sense via nonsense, there is a playful mood in the liminal mode that might seem to belie the seriousness of what is happening in these crisis rites; but play is serious business. It is a component part of such important animal and human functions as learning and mating. Play becomes very serious when it moves to the point of becoming game, where rules and patterns are decided that affect all the participants. Turner regards play as a liminal phenomenon, a threshold activity. Like other liminal phenomena it is. He says, in a subjunctive mood. "Subjunctivity is possibility. It might be." In the liminal stage of rites of passage, candidates refers to what may going through a novitiate are given a vision of the purposes and destiny of the group into which they will be incorporated. This vision can become a blueprint for a wished-for state of affairs, such as an ideal society. This is why Christian initiation without a viable catechumenate, ordination without a period of apprenticeship (e.g., seminary education, internship), or marriage without a period of engagement cannot produce what is maximally hoped for, even though the rites themselves are "validly" performed. But questions of validity are by nature reductionist. They are concerned with what one can minimally get by with and still have a valid rite. The real pastoral question should be. What conditions will allow the rites to work most effectively? Concerns about validity have constituted the



sacramental history of the Western church since the Middle Ages, whereas the Eastern churches have been concerned about fullness (pleroma). Precisely this marks the difference in liturgical and sacramental attitude and practice between Eastern and Western Christianity. Eastern Christianity has understood that the ritual process simply cannot be hurried; it must pursue its full course to arrive at its desired end (telos),

In addition to whatever visions or hopes are communicated to novices in the liminal stage of rites of passage, bonds of community are formed with others who are going through the ordeals of initiation. This is most evident in military boot camp and on college campuses. Victor Turner calls this experience *communitas* and says that it is an expression of antistructure. That is to say, *communitas* is spontaneous, immediate, and concrete, as opposed to norm-governed, institutionalized, and abstract (the nature of social structure). Those who experience *communitas* at the margins of social structure will inject an element of renewal into the society when they are incorporated into it.

Because the learnings and experiences of liminality and *communitas* are so vital to human society, certain aspects of what is learned and experienced in rites of passage are repeated periodically in the regular gatherings of the community, such as gatherings to rehearse the myths that tell the stories of the community's origins and destiny and the sacred meals that celebrate one's incorporation into the community. As E. Norbeck points out, the crisis rites tend to define and shape the community because they articulate the values and purposes of the community.?’

It is not surprising that a liminal quality pervades all ritual. Cyclical rites as well as Rites of passage. This is evident in the tenacity with which liturgical rites retain archaic forms. As Turner has suggested, “If ritual is not to be merely a reflection of secular social life, if its function is partly to protect and partly to express truths which make men free from the exigencies of their status incumbencies, free to contemplate and pray as well as to speculate and invent, then its repertoire of liturgical actions should not be limited to a direct reflection of the contemporary scene,”” Turner listened to songs and prayer formulae in dead languages at the initiation rites of the Ndembu and Lunda in Central Africa, and saw persons thoroughly immersed in a modern money economy taking part wholeheartedly in ritual actions hallowed by antiquity. He commented:

I do not believe such actions are hallowed merely because they are old but

Because they are metaphors for something most precious to all ‘modernities, to every living, viable society. They represent the chalice in which truth is

Conveyed, the symbolic inversion of the utilitarian, of the currently fashionable, and indeed, of the ensemble of institutionalized status-roles which composes the social structure. In other words, always and everywhere ritual ought

To have a pervasive archaic, repetitive, formal quality if it is to be a vehicle for Values and experiences which transcend those of status-striving, money-grubbing, and self-serving.

The historic liturgy of the church retains elements hallowed by antiquity, and in this way provides access to the liminal mode of existence. Liminality celebrates transition rather than status, and therefore provides the most appropriate mode of worship for Christians who are "strangers and pilgrims" in this world following the Christ who had "no place to rest his head." In other words, ritual that has "a pervasive archaic, repetitive, formal quality" is best able to provide that access to transcendence that an eschatological community requires. The ancient Christian catechumenate provided an institutionalization of liminality and *communitas* during the fourth and fifth centuries when the church was settling down into its new historical status as a licensed cult in the Roman Empire. It is not surprising that the monastic movement emerged in the church on the heels of the dissolution of the catechumenate, nor that the mendicant orders originated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when the monasteries had become wealthy and secularized (i.e., worldly). A community like the Christian church, which regards transition as its permanent condition in "this world," will find ways and means of institutionalizing liminality and straining to discover and preserve instances of *communitas*.

## THE ROLE OF MYTH

Myth and ritual belong together, although there has never been agreement on the nature of their relationship. A view of myth developed in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and in nineteenth-century positivism, which regarded myths as untrue stories. To some extent, this can be blamed on Christianity, which regarded anything not in the Bible as a fable. To the myths of the world Christianity contrasted its historical gospel. Myth was contrasted with historical fact.

Nevertheless, anthropologists began to analyze the role and value of myth. Operating under the influence of scientific positivism, pioneering anthropologists, such as Bronislaw Malinowski, described myth as a story that served to justify the present situation of a society and thereby contributed to social stability. Claude Lévi-Strauss refined this point of view to show how myths can be reactivated to legitimize a view of history that is useful to the present generation. Myths, like rituals, therefore, may bolster a view of origins or destiny that may serve either conservative or innovative ends. Mircea Eliade noted, however, that whatever purpose is served by telling the myth or sacred story, it is regarded as "absolutely true." Being real and sacred, the myth becomes

exemplary, and consequently repeatable, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as a justification for all human actions. In other words, a myth is a true history of what came to pass at the beginning of Time, and one which provides a pattern for human behavior.”

Understood in this way, the Christian gospel serves the function of myth in that it relates a story that is regarded absolutely true and that is intended to provide a pattern of behavior in those who hear it. The reading and telling of the gospel in Christian liturgy serves the same purpose as the ritual reenactment of myth in other communities and societies. Studying stories of the founding fathers in Fourth of July celebrations in nineteenth-century America will show the same purpose being served in the interests of a civil or secular religion. There are no societies without mythic stories that instill values and worldviews or that are bereft of the ritual means of reenacting them.

Victor Turner refined this theory of myth to suggest that “myths treat of origins but derive from transitions. . . . Myths relate how one state of affairs became another: how an unpeopled world became populated; how chaos became cosmos; how immortals became mortal; how the seasons came to replace a climate without seasons . . . and so on. Myths are liminal phenomena: they are frequently told at a time or in a state that is betwixt-and-between.” Thus the Gospels, which relate the mythic story of Jesus, are read on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, also known as the “eighth day,” the day that straddles this age and the age to come. The Gospels also serve as the essential content of that most liminal of Christian institutions, the catechumenate.

Mythic stories themselves often come out of a liminal or transitional situation

(e.g., in the Gospels, Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and passion; in American civil religion, the transition from colony to sovereignty marked by the Declaration of Independence) Biogeneticists Eugene d’Aquili, C. D. Laughlin, Jr, and J. McManus have proposed that mythmaking is a neurological attempt by the human organism, when faced with an unknown or unexplained stimulus or crisis, to organize it within a known conceptual framework. Communities tell and ritually enact their mythic stories in order to account for how crises or limitations can be overcome. By telling or reenacting myth in ritual drama, worshipers transcend their own time, fraught with crisis or limitation, by entering into primordial or eschatological time. It is necessary that myths take place in primordial or eschatological time so they can escape the defects and limitations of the present time.

This does not mean that myth takes place outside of time, because then it would be of no relevance to us. Rather, myths tell the stories of gods or heroes who share our vicissitudes but surmount them. In this way myths, which are transparent to the sacred and the eternal, kindle in us a hope of transcending the secular and the temporal, not as something that humankind can achieve through a Promethean effort, but as something that can be received by obediently performing the rites.

Of course, the stories that tell about the origin and destiny of the Jewish and Christian communities are historical events, and are, by definition, unrepeatable. There is also a sense in which the Bible, which is the language of liturgy, has demythologized myths. A well-known example is the first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, in which the celestial bodies—sun, moon, and stars—divinities in the Babylonian worldview, are put in their place as lights in the firmament by the God who created them. In the last book of the Bible. In Revelation 4, the four living creatures, who represent the cosmos, never cease to sing “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” Again, the cosmos that has been worshiped as divine is reduced to the status of creatures worshipping the true God.

Thus, while the Bible demythologizes myths, it does not abandon mythical language. For example, the Canticle of Moses in Exodus 15:1-21, which celebrates the escape of the Israelite slaves from Egypt through the sea, expresses this event as if it were about the conquest of the primordial chaos and the birth of a new creation. The event of the exodus is unrepeatable, but it was reinterpreted and applied to new situations, such as the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon. The Lord whose arm slew the ancient dragon and dried up the sea is besought as the source of a new exodus through the wilderness in Isaiah 51:9-11. The image of the exodus, interpreted in mythical language, is applied to new situations. These images of deliverance and rebirth are rehearsed in the readings of the Easter Vigil, which lead to the action at the baptismal font, which becomes a new sea through which a new people is led to be delivered from sin and reborn as God’s people.

While the Bible demythologizes, it does not demythicize. Liturgy retains the Bible’s mythical language. This is a language of images and stories, which are heard in the readings, sung in the psalms and canticles, and unpacked in sermons. Modern worshipers can no longer take myths literally—hence the need for demythologization. Nor can they afford to ignore mythic reality, because the images and stories connect us with the awesome and the transcendent, which provide meaning in life. The speaking snake of Genesis 3 did not really exist, but we are always listening to that snake because it has something to tell us that we want to hear. So the story of the snake, and the tragic consequences of listening to it, must be told. Sermons may suggest where the voice of the snake is speaking today, but even in the act of unpacking the story, the sermon cannot avoid mythical language. And to the extent that the sermon draws upon, applies, and reiterates the mythical language, it has a liturgical quality. It does not stand as something separate from outside liturgy. It is itself a liturgical act whose purpose is to connect our stories with the stories of the people of God down through the ages, so that their faith or unbelief becomes our faith or illumines our unbelief. Such an act of preaching builds up the community of faith in the faith, and usually does so in a style of delivery that is less propositional than it is a form of incanting. In fact, African American liturgy the preacher not infrequently breaks into chant as he gets more emotionally involved in retelling the story in the sermon. The people are also brought into the act of incantation by chanting responses to the stories heard in scripture, since the

scripture readings and the preaching are surrounded by singing in the forms of psalmody and hymnody.

## THE ROLE of MUSIC

It may seem strange to insert at this point a word about music. But historically the function of music in liturgical rites is traced to a point where we hardly look for it today: to the chanting of sacred texts. Music has acquired a role in worship for reasons both utilitarian and spiritual. A basic reason for chanting is that singing texts aids in memorization, which was very important before the time of printed worship books and widespread literacy. For example, the hymns of the great Indian Sanskrit collection, the Rigveda, were intoned. The musicologist Gerald Abraham suggests that “owing to the frightful consequences of even slight error, .. it is possible modern intonation of Rigvedic texts has not been much modified in the course of three millennia.” And yet the Hindu did not regard music only as a useful aid in the memorization and recitation of texts; chanting also fostered a state of meditation that enabled the person to break away from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth and be absorbed into the spirit of the universe (nirvana).

Even in a literary society there are utilitarian reasons for employing music in worship. Chanting makes the recitation of texts by a group more effective because the rhythm keeps the group together. For example, 1 Chronicles records that the Levites were “put in charge of the service of song in the house of the LORD (1 Chron. 6:31), and what they sang in the Temple were the texts of the psalms. The verse structure of the psalms suggests that they were probably sung to short melodic patterns repeated over and over again with the necessary variations. Some of the psalms may have been sung antiphonally—two groups alternating back and forth from verse to verse—and others may have been sung responsorially—a group responding to a soloist. These different ways of singing the psalms suggest that there was also a concern to heighten or bring out the meaning of the text (or to employ a text in such a way as to bring out or heighten the meaning of the action or event for which the psalm was accompaniment or commentary. It is clear from Chronicles that the singing was supported by instruments.

In many ancient cults, instrumental music was employed in conjunction with sacrifices, Johannes Quasten pointed out that this was not just to drown out the noises of animals about to be immolated, since music also accompanied unbloody sacrifices such as incense offerings. Rather, flute playing and dancing were supposed to call down the good gods, while the blowing of horns and the sounding of gongs and bells were supposed to ward off evil gods and demons. The church fathers condemned the use of instrumental music in Christian worship precisely because instruments had been employed in pagan cults.

Nevertheless, Christian worship has employed singing throughout its history to serve the word and to engender a sense of ecstasy in worship. There are liturgies in the Eastern and Western Christian traditions in which everything is sung—all prayers psalms, readings, dialogical responses, except possibly the homily. Yet, as we said above, in some traditions even the preacher breaks into chant during the course of the sermon. And in the Western Christian

tradition, instruments were introduced into liturgical performance once they no longer evoked associations with pagan cults.

## SACRED MEALS AND SACRIFICES

At the conclusion of initiation rites and at periodic intervals, communities have offered sacrifices and participated in sacred meals. Sacrifices and meals serve the purpose of forming the bonds of community. Roman Catholics and Protestants have divided over the question of whether the eucharist is primarily a sacrifice or a meal. But R. K. Yerkes has shown that what we call by the Latin word sacrifice is a sacred meal. "The word sacrifice, which means 'to make a thing sacred or 'to do a sacred act,' was used in Latin to describe various rites which arose from the common meal when that meal was held, not for the ordinary purpose of satisfying hunger, but for the sake of entering into union with the mysterious Power or powers which men felt within them and about them as life itself and which they recognized in all their environments as both menacing and strengthening the life which they loved and to which they longed to cling."

Thus, sacrifices are primarily meals of the gods in which human beings participate by paying for them, preparing them, or even eating them (as in the communion sacrifices). The Christian eucharist is, phenomenologically considered, both a sacred meal and a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice because bread and wine are offered, consecrated, and eaten and drunk with the understanding that the communicants enter into fellowship with the One who is both priest and victim. Put another way, sacrifice has served as a metaphor describing communion in Christ, who is our Passover sacrifice (1 Cor. 5-7).

Protestant aversion to works-righteousness (the attempt to wring a blessing from God apart from trust in God's word of promise) has blinded us to the reality of sacrifice generally. But especially to those sacrifices of the doubtful variety in which it appears that the meeting between the god and the human in the sacrificial rite takes the form of a business transaction. But as Gerhard van der Leeuw has observed, we should not be misled by imposing our own modern way of thinking on the attitudes of primitive people.

When we think of a business transaction, we understand a purely material exchange with no spiritual overtones. For the primitive, business relationships implied some sort of fellowship. Furthermore, to interpret any kind of sacrifice as though it were purely profitable to the offerer and manipulative of the deity is to miss the point. Sacrifice was an act of fellowship or communion between the divine and the human, and therefore involved food to eat and drink such as grain, meat, and wine. Because our thinking about sacrifice tends to be confused, it might be helpful to list the six ways in which Yerkes claims that

The ancient idea of sacrifice differs substantially from ours.

1. Sacrifice in the ancient world had no secular connotations whatever; it was a sacred act involving the divine-human relationship.
2. Sacrifices were occasions of joy and festivity, and the highest forms of sacrifice were the sacrifices of thanksgiving.

The offerings

3. Because sacrifices were occasions of joy and festivity were as large as possible- often because the eating and drinking was a communal activity.
4. Sacrifices were offered to the gods. The emphasis was on the gift given, not on giving up something in the sense of experiencing a loss.
5. Sacrifices were more frequently thanksgivings for blessings received than petitions for divine favor Therefore there was little sense of a “business transaction” in most sacrifices,
6. The death of the victim was not the sacrifice itself, Yerkes says that “no significance was ever attached to the fact that the animal had died. We never hear o death qua death effecting anything.” The sacrifice consists in the offering of the victim. Yerkes believes that the confounding of death and sacrifice is the starting point of most of our difficulties in understanding sacrifice. The death was simply a means to an end; the end was the necessity of providing food for a sacred meal.

What about the sin offerings in ancient Israel? Was there not a suggestion that

They Served purpose of atonement or propitiation? The sacrifices related to sin, including the chatta'th or asham, as well as the liturgy of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), were offered by the priests themselves and not by the people. One who had committed a sin could not offer a sacrifice because such a person would not be in the state of ritual purity that was required of those who offered sacrifices. The sacrifices offered by the priest alone served to remove the ritual impurity of the individual or of the nation as a whole. In the sin offerings a part of the sacrificed victim was eaten by the priests, and the remainder was consumed by fire. In the Yom Kippur liturgy, the ritual purification of the whole nation of Israel was accomplished by the blood of the victim being sprinkled on the priests and on the Holy of Holies, but the animal slaughtered (the scapegoat) was not offered to the Lord, It was hauled outside the camp and burned.

There is a notion of sin here that is very ancient. Such sin is religious rather than moral, and had to be dealt with ritually rather than ethically, In most cases the sin was unavoidable, and involuntary, such as childbirth or leprosy. The sin offering after childbirth was not for the purpose of removing any moral lapse, but simply to reinstate the mother in the community of the faithful, Likewise, the true offering of the leper was not a petition to remove the sin that caused the disease, since it could not be offered until after the ten, “Where sin was unwittingly or

unconsciously or wholly ritual there could not be any leper was cleansed, Rather, it was a thank-offering for healing. As H. H. Rowley has written true repentance, and the ritual cleansing could only be thought of as automatic. This could only tend to make men think of all sacrificial acts automatic in their effects. This was the attitude which the great pre-exilic prophets condemned, and it was equally far from the mind of the framers of the Priestly Law.”

Behind the ancient understanding of sin as ritual contamination, for which ritual purification was the antidote, was the idea that contact with the holy exposed the human being who had the temerity to approach it with a consciousness of oneself as a sinner. Isaiah in the Temple cries out, “Woe is me I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). This text expresses a very profound appreciation of the divine-human relationship. As Louis Bouyer put it, “The sacral, ritual root of the idea of sin is the feeling which man has of God’s radical transcendence whenever he moved to have recourse to Him. It is practically the counterpart of that holy familiarity to which man is called in sacrifice, and it is that which keeps this familiarity from becoming sacrilegious.”

## SACRED TIMES AND FESTIVALS

A sacrifice is fundamentally a meeting with God in a sacred meal. Because God is the source of life for the individual and the community, it is desirable that such a meeting take place on a regular basis. But the times of the meeting are not arbitrary; they have special significance. It is not surprising that the natural calendar determines these special times for many religions. Daily assemblies and sacrifices are clustered around the alternating of day and night. But the solar year also provides an essential framework for ritual celebrations. The return of the year with the rebirth of life gave the appearance of a genuine repetition of the creative act where the divine work is seen again in every new birth. Times of planting and harvesting have been laden with sacred significance.

On a lesser scale the rhythms of the moon with its succession of months constitutes a different hierophany or mode of sacred revelation, one that is maternal rather than paternal since it is often connected with female menstrual cycles. Thierry Maertens writes that “as early as three thousand years before the birth of Christ most of the religions of the East were regulated according to the lunar cycle.” “The Jews observed the new moon like their pagan neighbors by offering a clan sacrifice, although they played down the fertility aspects of the celebration and emphasized instead the renewal of the covenant with Yahweh. The new year was simply a more solemn new moon feast. It was a time of purification, of the expulsion of sins, of demons, or of a scapegoat. Eliade explains that “it is not a matter merely of a certain temporal interval coming to its end and the beginning of another (as a modern man, for example, thinks); it is also a matter of abolishing



the past year and past time.” And as the new moon feasts served as occasions for renewal of the covenant among the Jews, so the New Year’s Festival was also a time of covenant renewal. The acclamations or trumpet blasts of Rosh Hashanah have raised the question of whether Israel also celebrated the new year as a feast of Yahweh’s enthronement as King of Creation.

The final step in calendrical calculations seems to have been taken by the Babylonians, whose astronomical observations led them to introduce the week. Their astrological interests led them to cease from work on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and nineteenth days (the latter was the forty-ninth day after the beginning of the preceding month) because these were “unlucky days” on which one could risk the wrath of the gods. The Jews developed the concept of the Sabbath from these unlucky days, but transformed the whole concept. Their day of rest was not a matter of astrological caprice but a proclamation of their liberation from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:12-15). Even the later Priestly documents in the Pentateuch emphasize the theology of election in connection with the Sabbath observance. The chosen people of God are privileged to unite themselves to the life of God by participating in his rest (Exod. 20:11; 31:12-17).

The Sabbath became the primary day of worship for the Jews, especially after The Babylonian exile. It was observed by meetings in the synagogues to read and study the Torah. It is arguable whether the ancient Christian Sunday meeting was a transference of the Old Testament Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first day (the day of the resurrection of Jesus). It is certain that elements of the Jewish Sabbath were later absorbed into the Christian Lord’s Day (dies Dominica), and that Christian worship was also held on this weekly fixed day. It should also be noted that the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day are essentially affirmative rather than negative like the Babylonian unlucky days. The Sabbath affirms the goodness of God’s creation and the Lord’s Day affirms the redemption of the world in the resurrection as God’s work of new creation. The philosopher Josef Pieper asserts that “festivity lives on affirmation.” He adds that to “celebrate a festival means: to live out, for some special occasion and in an uncommon manner, the universal assent to the world as a whole.” He also asserts, “Festivity is impossible to the nay-sayer. The element of affirmation, and the experience of rejuvenation Or renewal that

Is the fruit of celebration, can be seen in the three great commemorative festivals in Judaism: the Feasts of Tents (Succoth)- -sometimes referred to as Booths or Tabernacles; Unleavened Bread (Pesach); and Weeks (Shawuoth). The origins of each of these festivals lie in an agrarian or nomadic rite; but each was transformed into a historical commemoration.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, originally a spring harvest festival, was combined with the nomadic rite of offering the firstborn lamb to form the Passover festival. As such it lost its agricultural and nomadic associations and became the celebration of Israel’s liberation from slavery in Egypt. The Feast of Weeks, so called because it was held Seven weeks after the Feast

of Unleavened Bread, became a historical commemoration of the promulgation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The Feast of Tents, with its retention of the ancient custom of living in temporary huts while dressing the vines, became a historical commemoration of Israel's journey through the wilderness and conquest of the promised land. After the Babylonian exile, eschatological motifs were easily grafted onto the Feast of Tents so that it became a celebration of Israel's destiny as well as its origin.

Not one of these feasts continued in the practices of the Christian community. Yet all of them were regarded as fulfilled in the person of Jesus the Christ. We can see this personification of the festival in Jesus' participation in the Feast of Tents, in which the Gospel of John records: "On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). On the last day of the feast there was, in Jesus' day, a procession to bring water from the pool of Silo to the Temple, where it was poured on the altar in memory of the rock of living water that followed Israel in the wilderness. During the procession Jesus apparently presented himself as the new rock of living water.

In a similar way the apostle Paul proclaimed: "For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:7-8). Finally, according to Acts 2:1-4, on the morning of the Feast of Pentecost the apostles were assembled like their contemporaries to meditate on the Torah, when suddenly the phenomena of Sinai were renewed for them. As Yahweh had come down on Sinai in fire, amidst thunder and lightning (Exod. 19:16-18), so the Spirit of God came as tongues of fire resting on each of the apostles. The Pentecost of the Spirit fulfilled the Pentecost of the Law. Because the events commemorated in these three great festivals were personified in Jesus the Christ and his Spirit, there was no need for Christians to continue celebrating the old festivals. But the content of these festivals was spiritualized and elements of their meaning were retained and transformed in the new Christian festivals that celebrated the person and work of Jesus the Christ and his Spirit.

The connections between Passover and Easter and the Jewish and Christian Pentecost are easily recognizable. The content of the Feast of Tents has been scattered throughout several Christian observances. This festival was important to early Christian writers because of the eschatological perspective that it acquired in Judaism. Zechariah 14:16 prophesies a day on which "who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year" to Zion to worship the Lord at the Feast of Tents. This was an exuberantly celebrated festival which drew pilgrims to Jerusalem from throughout the Diaspora. On their way up to the city they sang the songs of ascent (Pss. 120-134), "The libations with water and the torchlight processions around the Temple were striking: Priests sang the words of Isaiah 12:3, "With joy you will draw water from

the wells of salvation.” The trumpets sounded as the people moved in procession, waving lulab and trod. In the evening a ceremony of light was held in the forecourt before the burning golden candlestick in which the people sang antiphonally and danced. The Gospel of John, which is actually structured around the three Jewish pilgrim feasts, devotes chapters 7-9 to events that took place during the Feast of Tents. It was in this context that Jesus invited the thirsty to come to him and drink (John 7:37-38) and, in connection with the torchlight illumination of the Temple, proclaimed himself as the “light of the world” (John 8:12). The Gospel of John begins with the idea of the Feast of Tents by announcing that “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” John 1:14, my translation). The book of Revelation gives an eschatological vision of God dwelling with his people (Rev. 21:3). It is not surprising that Jean Danielou found parallels between the Feast of Tents and Christmas (the gospel for Christmas Day is John 1:1-14). Palm Sunday (procession with palms and reference to Zechariah), the Transfiguration Peter wanted to build booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah), and the September Ember Days in the old Roman liturgy (which contains references in all the readings to the Jewish autumnal observances).

## SACRED PLACES

The community that meets to rehearse its myths, offer its sacrifices, and celebrate its festivals needs a meeting place. The meeting place is often a location where divinity has revealed itself, or, lacking a theophany, a location that serves as a sign pointing to divinity. Altars and poles can demarcate a sacred space; mountains or trees can point to divinity. The sacred space is a place from which to acquire orientation. It can be the center of a territory or a threshold place I “agate of heaven”), It is the whole creation on a microscopic scale, and the community takes possession of it—that is, consecrates it by repeating the cosmogony or paradigmatic work of the gods.

Many sacred spaces were marked out by the erection of temples or shrines. The Temple precinct itself was the fanum (sacred space); stretching around it was the profanum, the space of ordinary life that derived meaning from the sacred. The Greek word Temenos (temple), derives from the verb temno, “to cut out” or “separate.”” The temple itself was usually small because it was a house for the god, not the people. Only the priests went into the sanctuary, the people gathered in the courtyard or plaza in front of the temple.

At first Israel had no temple. The God of the patriarchs disclosed himself in places along the way in their journey to “the land that I will show you” (Gen 12:1). The patriarchal journeys were dotted with wayside shrines but not permanent places of orientation. When Israel was led out of Egypt, the people assembled before the holy mountain of Sinai to receive a theophany—Israel’s revelation of God’s will in the Torah, God’s Commandments. The stone tablets on which the Commandments were inscribed were carried in a portable box called the Ark of the Covenant. It went ahead of the host of Israel, the cloud above it both revealing and hiding, the presence of

Yahweh. Once Israel settled in the promised land, Israelites were attracted to the fertility rites of the surrounding populations. To prevent a wholesale slide into idolatry, together with his desire to shore up his political leverage among the people, King David centralized the Israelite cult in Jerusalem, his capital city. His son Solomon built a temple there that became the center of the sacrificial cult. The temple was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C.E. It was during the Babylonian exile that the religion of Israel was transformed into what would become Judaism as we have come to know it. The scribes wrote down the sacred stories into sacred scriptures, and pious Jews assembled in meeting places (synagogues) to study and meditate on the Law (Torah) and the prophets (Haftarah). After the Exile a second temple was built at Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, but it never equaled the glory of the first temple. And the final Isaiah announced the ruin of the temple because it was too small for Yahweh. "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine" (Isa. 66:1-2).

In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus also foretold the destruction of the Jerusalem

Temple (Mark 13:2; Matt. 24:2). The event that precipitated the events of the passion of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels was Jesus' cleansing of the Temple after his entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' cleansing of the Temple occurs at the outset of his ministry (John 2:13-22), and he proclaims himself as the new Temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ... But he was speaking of the temple of his body" (John 2:19, 21). Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him" (John 4:21, 23).

The anti-Temple polemic in the Gospels reflects the fact that they were written in close proximity to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. Especially in Mark there was a concern to wean Jewish Christians away from reliance on the Temple or on Jerusalem itself as the center of Christian mission. In the deutero-Pauline letters there is also a tendency to transfer loyalty from the Temple to Christ himself. And to the church as the body of Christ, In Ephesians, Christ is the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets are the foundation, and all Christians are part of the building – "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22; RSV). Christians are the temple of God because the Spirit of God dwells in the community (1 Cor. 3:16). This is the reason given for avoiding any syncretism with pagan beliefs. "What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16) In 1 Peter, Christ is called the living stone rejected by humankind, and Christians are called living stones of the temple of this Spirit (1 Peter 2:4-5).

The church itself, therefore, is the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Any building erected for Christian worship is not a temple for deity but a meeting place or a house for the church. To be sure, after the Edict of Milan in 313. When Christianity became a legal cult in the Roman Empire, and the church could erect meeting places for worship, the church buildings acquired a sense of orientation: they were built on an east-west axis because Christians faced west to renounce the devil at baptism and faced east to pray to Christ, the sun of righteousness. Nevertheless, the consecration of church buildings served to proclaim the use of that building. As Bouyer wrote, “this place is sacred only because it is the place for the Eucharistic celebration, toward which the preaching of the Word leads, inviting us at the same time to advance toward the east, that is, to the parousia of the glorious Christ.”

The orientation of the church building is simply to accommodate the eschatological community that assembles in it. The community itself is the new cosmos in which Christ is Lord of all (Pantocrator), the place of light that is only reached by turning away from darkness (note the symbolism of the Easter Vigil in which the congregation processes into the dark church building with the light of Christ, the paschal candle). For this reason there is need of a decisive passage through the waters of death to the new life in Christ. The real consecration of the church—which is the new people of God, the body of Christ, and not a building- is baptism itself.

## SACRED PERSONS

In ancient cultures there were persons invested with sacral character. A typical example is a king who discharges a divine role by maintaining order in the state. The sovereign came to be regarded as a son or daughter of the gods, as happened in Egypt, China, and Japan. In Rome, too, the development of imperial dignity was accompanied by divinization. It became a public obligation to offer incense to the emperor’s statue, and no one was exempt except the Jews. Naturally, Christians would not accept the divinity of the emperor or offer incense to his effigy. This often led to martyrdom.

In Israel itself the kingship was resisted precisely because of the aura of divinity that accrued to the office and person of the king. When kingship was accepted, and Saul and then David were anointed, the king did not assume the role of high priest, as was the case in other societies, Nor were his opinions regarded as oracles. God’s oracles were the prophets, not the sovereign, and the little tribe of Levi was given the priestly dignity. The prophets and priests of Israel antedate the monarchy by several centuries, tracing back to Moses and Aaron respectively, who were regarded as the archetypal prophet and priest. Even so, neither the prophets nor the priests were more sacred than the kings. The three together partook of the sacredness of the whole people. As God said to Moses on Mount Sinai at the time of the promulgation of the covenant with Israel. Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the

Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore if obey my voice and keep my Covenant you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth, is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. Exod 19:3, 6).

We cannot study a particular tradition of worship without understanding the worshipers in that tradition. Liturgy is done by a people who constitute a liturgical assembly. Therefore this first chapter concludes by considering the character of the people of God, described in the above passage as ‘a priestly kingdom and a holy nation,’ who do liturgy.

John H. Elliott has devoted considerable attention to this passage and to its textual tradition in the Old and New Testaments. He points out that this pericope lays down both the conditions and the promise of the covenant. The conditions are that Israel should do what humanity has not done: “obey my voice.” The promises are that “you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” The parallelism of ‘priestly kingdom’ and “holy nation” suggests the elements of sanctity and collectivity. Israel is to be “holy as priests are holy,” and this applies to the nation as a whole and not just to individuals. The great age of this text makes it unlikely that it is a veiled polemic against the Levitical priesthood. For the same reason it is difficult to see in this text the idea of Israel exercising a priestly role as mediator between God and the nations. The idea embedded in this text is much simpler: Israel belongs to and serves Yahweh alone.

This basic idea was not to receive further textual expression until much later in Israel’s history when the crossing of the Jordan, the conquest of Canaan, the time of the judges, the period of the kings and the divided monarchy, and the experience of exile and dispersion were past. It is after the Babylonian captivity, when the exiles were preparing for a second exodus and wilderness wandering experience as they prepared to return to the land of promise, that we find echoes of Exodus 19:6 in Isaiah 61:6.

You shall be called priests of the LORD,  
You shall be named ministers of our God;  
You shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,  
And in their riches you shall glory.

The context of this verse in Isaiah 61 is the prophecy of Israel’s restoration. It is a time of the Lord’s favor and vengeance (61:2). In a reversal of fortunes, Israel will exchange mourning for

gladness (61:3) and shame for everlasting joy (61:7). The Lord is reestablishing with Israel an everlasting covenant (61:8). The weight of verse 6 is the restoration of Israel's honor and dignity before the eyes of the nations (goim). The parallelism of "priests of the Lord" and "ministers of our God" suggests much more the Levitical priesthood than the general vocation to holiness in Exodus 19:6. The Jewish scholar, I. W. Slotki, picked up on this idea with the suggestion that "as the priests subsisted upon what the Israelites allocated to them, so the priestly nation will be supported by the other people since it is dedicated to the Divine Service."<sup>47</sup> The idea is that as the

Levites were supported by the other eleven tribes of Israel, so Israel would be supported by the other nations. This is a way of describing Israel's eschatological destiny. The metaphor of "priesthood" relates also to Deutero-Isaiah's idea that Israel's vocation is to be "a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" (42:6, 49:8; 59:21; 60:1-3). A significant difference, therefore, between this passage and Exodus 19:6 is that the covenant formula was concerned with Israel's relationship to Yahweh while Deutero-Isaiah is concerned with Israel's relationship to the world.

In spite of the last prophecies added to the book of Isaiah, and perhaps because

of the hopes fanned by the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel, the restoration of Israel seemed far from realization. Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt; a cult enlightened by the scribal teaching that had developed during the exile was instituted there; and there was even an attempt to restore the monarchy. Yet Haggai could assert that this restoration on the material level was only a faint shadow of the former glory of Zion. Nevertheless, the vision of Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah continued to excite expectation of a future Jerusalem whose light would shine on the nations. To its cult would be brought the offerings of the whole world. A new priesthood would be consecrated in which not only the dispersed of Israel would have a place but perhaps even the goim. "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts (Mal 1:11). The church fathers picked up this text from the last of the prophets and proclaimed that it pointed to the pure offering of the Gentiles in the messianic age: the eucharistic sacrifice.

Under the Seleucids, Persian tolerance gave way to a fanatical attempt to assimilate the Jews to the Hellenistic culture of their own country. The apocryphal writings that emerged during this time of cultural imperialism and political persecution emphasized the unique identity of Israel. The revolt of a priestly family, the Maccabees, put a stop to this direction of cultural assimilation and reestablished a kind of priestly monarchy under the Hasmoneans. Second Maccabees is primarily a Greek composition by an Alexandrian Jew whose intention was to foster reverence for the Temple in Jerusalem and also strict observance of the Maccabean festivals as a way of cementing the bonds of unity between Palestinian and Egyptian Jews. In 2 Maccabees 2:16-18, there is an allusion to the ancient covenant formula of Exodus 19:6.

Since, therefore, we are about to celebrate the purification, we write to you. Will you therefore please keep the days? It is God who has saved all his people and has returned the inheritance to all and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, as he promised through the law. We have hope in God that he will soon have, mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has rescued us from great evils and has purified the place. Reference to kingship and the priesthood and the consecration” is made in connection with the celebration of the Feast of the Purification of the Temple. The author shows awareness of the covenant context of Exodus 19 by referring to the promise given through the law. 2 Maccabees 2 thus presents an optimism not grounded in a political messiah but in the faithfulness of God to the chosen people.

The problem with the success of the Maccabean revolt was that the priesthood was secularized because it was politicized. And because the priesthood was politicized, its members found ways of compromising first with the Greek and then with the Roman conquerors of Palestine. Their business involvements with the foreign occupiers of their country, despite their ritual and doctrinal conservatism, earned for the members of the priestly families (the Sadducees) the disdain of pious Israelites. As a reaction there appeared the party of the Pharisees (the separated ones), who were recruited from the leading laity and from whose ranks came the teachers of the law, the rabbis. The rabbis were seen as the genuine spiritual successors of the ancient priestly scribes. They saw in the strict observance of the ritual prescriptions of the Torah the dam they needed to preserve the identity of Israel from being flooded by assimilation to pagan customs, morals, and ideas. The rabbis developed a genre of oral and written tradition known as Halakah, whose casuistic punctiliousness was designed to reach the inner person through the outward discipline of obedience to the Torah.

Out of all the groups that flourished and competed for the soul of Israel during the latter days of the Second Temple, only Pharisaic Judaism and Christianity survived its destruction to reconstitute the religion of Israel. Neither Pharisaic Judaism (the party of the synagogue) nor the messianic sect known as Christianity depended on the Temple, its priesthood or sacrificial cult as the focus of their devotion. Rather, both of these groups gathered around the study of the scriptures, a domestic meal, a lustration rite and a concept of prayer as spiritual sacrifice. The antagonism between Jesus and the Pharisees in the Gospels undoubtedly reflects the competition between the local synagogue community and the local Christian community. The Christians were distinguished from the Pharisees by their devotion to Jesus as Israel's Messiah and the universal claims they made for this Christ. In both of these claims they depended on an apocalyptic mood and antinationalist perspective that put them at odds with the religion of the Pharisees. In reversing (or hastening?) the expectation of Isaiah that the nations shall come to the light of



God's glory on Mount Zion, the Christians went to the nations with the light of the gospel of Christ,

In all respects the church worked out its identity and mission in terms of continuity and discontinuity with Israel. The church understood itself to be the community that recognized and followed the Messiah of Israel, so long expected, to the verge of the eschaton. It is a community that assembles to proclaim and celebrate Christ's passage from death to life, and to anticipate that passage for itself. As the barriers of time and space have been overcome in the resurrection of Christ, so that all times and places can become the times and places of encounter with God and salvation, so all the people baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ constitute a new society, a new people of God, in which barriers between people are overcome. There is no longer male or female, Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian. Slave or free. But only Christ in all (Col, 3:11). A new people is formed whose ties are not based on blood, class, or geography, but only on faith in the risen Christ. What applied to ancient Israel now applies a fortiori to the church. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

This text has served as the locus classicus for the Protestant doctrine of the Priesthood of all believers, and this has tended to influence its interpretation, Eliot points out that it is important to see the long list of Old Testament quotations or allusions in this passage, and also to see it as the climax of the entire paraenetic section of 1 Peter 1:13-2:10. Maertens has exegeted it as a Christian paschal homily, and there are indeed many allusions to the Passover story in Exodus.' The salvation foretold by the prophets has been accomplished in the passion and glorification of Christ. "Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed (1:13). The hearers/readers are to turn from their former way of life and lead an obedient life as God-fearers because they have been redeemed by Jesus the sacrificial lamb without defect or blemish He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the times for your sake" (1:19-20).

Sanctifying themselves in obedience, the newly born in Christ are to practice "genuine mutual love" (1:22). They are to abstain or separate themselves from hypocrisy and guile and, as newborn babies, yearn for the pure, spiritual milk" of the word, that they might "grow into salvation" (2:1-2). For the word that gave them birth is that which nourishes and affords growth-the word of Jesus the Lord (2:3).

This is exactly the kind of exhortation that a bishop or presbyter of the church would give to those about to be or just baptized. The emphasis of this sermon is on the personal relationship between the believer and Jesus. That emphasis continues in verses 2:4ff, by coming to Jesus in faith believers are made alive as Jesus has been made alive. They have been elected by God as he

was elected. They grow, are built, are united into a community of God's people (2:5). They have become precious (2:7) because they have believed in the Precious One (2:4, 6, 7), Having obeyed the word, they participate in God's mighty deeds of salvation and have been made heirs of the covenant of mercy (2:9f.). Proclamation of this word now becomes their task for through Jesus Christ they have become the covenant people, a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" (2:5).

Elliott concludes: The form and content of 1 Peter 2:4-10 reveal that this section was an attempt to describe via the motif of election the character of responsibility of the eschatological People of God, her bond with Jesus Christ, her infusion with the Spirit, her holiness, and her task of witness through the holy life and the proclamation of the saving deeds of God." As Exodus 19.6 had no connection with the Levitical priesthood, and certainly was not a polemic against it, so 1 Peter 2:9 had no connection with the special ordained ministry that emerged in the church and was certainly not a polemic

Against it, in fact, 1 Peter 5 presupposes the existence of elders or presbyters in the Church, and the author of 1 Peter writes as one presbyter to others. Thus, 1 Peter 2.9 does not depict the rights and privileges of individuals, such as have been emphasized in the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers; but rather the text is concerned with "the electedness and holiness of the corporate people of God." What Krister Stendahl notes concerning the significance of election generally in the New Testament applies to 1 Peter "Election in Christ not only constitutes a new society; its meaning is to be found in the new society, and not in the status of individuals."

This does not mean that the concept of a priestly people is without cultic content. Israel, like other Middle Eastern nations, had a sacrificial cult and a special priesthood to preside at sacrifices. But lay Israelites also had a role in the sacrificial worship. In the "democratization" of the restored temple after the Exile, the institution of the Ma'amad ensured the participation of representatives from local communities in the daily sacrifices of the temple. While these sacrifices were being offered in Jerusalem, the rest of the congregation of Israel met in local synagogues for daily prayer services that, as a consequence, acquired the sense of being spiritual sacrifices. This development had a profound influence on Christian liturgy and the understanding of the eucharist as a spiritual or "unbloody" sacrifice, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

A representative or ordained priesthood also emerged in the church that was given responsibility for presiding at this eucharistic sacrifice. But the participation of the priestly people was also expected and ensured, at least by the use of the word of assent, "Amen," to the Great Thanksgiving, by means of which the people made this central prayer of the liturgy their own. There are also prayers that the faithful offer on their own in intercession and thanksgiving, often through their representative, the deacon. The sense of belonging to a priestly community is preserved by the development of distinct liturgical roles within the liturgical assembly, and no

study of Christian liturgy can ignore this communitarian way in which the liturgy is celebrated by a holy people.